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Do Electoral Systems Affect Female Representation?

Comparing the Proportion of Women in Rwandan and Tanzanian Legislatures

With increased calls for equal representation of the sexes in government throughout the world, various countries have employed gender-quota systems in their national legislatures. One such country, Rwanda, has achieved the number one rank of proportion of women in its national parliament, with 56.3 percent being women. However other countries, despite making similar attempts through enacting gender quota systems, have not been as successful as Rwanda. For example, Tanzania is tied for rank number twenty on the global scale with 36 percent of its national parliament being women (Women in Parliaments). As both similar countries took measures to increase female representation in national parliament by implementing gender quota systems, why has one been more successful than the other? Pippa Norris' theory that electoral systems affect the proportion of women in government best answers this question.

In my paper, I will first present why Rwanda and Tanzania are comparable countries. As the two are similar to each other in many regards, including type of government and economy, one would expect them to have equal levels of female representation. However, in Tanzania, the female members of parliament almost exclusively hold the seats reserved for them, whereas in Rwanda women are running for and winning open seats in parliament. I will address a solution that other scholars have put forth to answer this puzzle, that Rwanda's genocide accounts for this difference, and explain why it is incorrect. As the notable difference between the two countries is in their electoral systems, with Rwanda having a proportional representation system and Tanzania having a single member district plurality system, I will argue that Pippa Norris' theory,

which says that countries with proportional representation systems have higher female representation, is the reason behind this difference in Rwanda and Tanzania. I will analyze how well each of Norris' causal mechanisms fit in regards to this case. Lastly I will address the weaknesses of Norris' argument, analyzing how political culture may also be at work in causing the difference between female representation in the two countries

The difference in the proportion of women in the two countries is puzzling given that their government systems are strikingly similar. Both countries are republics. Rwanda is not free according to the Freedom House measure, whereas Tanzania is partly free (Sub-Saharan Africa). These levels of freedom, one way to measure democratization, are similar as neither country is fully ranked as free. The idea that neither country is significantly more democratic than the other is also shown in the Polity IV scale, where Rwanda is ranked at - 4 and Tanzania at - 1 (Marshall). As both of these rankings are negative without being lower than - 5, they show each country is slightly undemocratic but not dramatically so. With neither country having a positive ranking or a free scale, neither is fully seen as democratic, showing that their governments are similar and comparable. It is important to note that although neither country is ranked as democratic, each parliament still passes legislation that affects their country. This makes it important to look at how the parliaments are comprised. As to government makeup, Rwanda is a presidential republic with proportional representation, whereas Tanzania has direct voting with a simple majority system (CIA World Factbook). With a proportional representation system, Rwanda has a quota based electoral system set up in multimember districts. This creates a proportional outcome, where the proportion of each party voted for mirrors that party's proportion in office. Tanzania's simple majority system means individuals cast a single vote for a candidate in a single-member district. The candidate with the most votes elected wins from that

district (Clark, Golder and Golder). As these are two different types of electoral systems, this is likely a factor that affects the proportion of women in their governments. This idea will be explored more in-depth later on. Lastly in regards to government makeup, Rwanda has three major political parties and Tanzania has four (CIA World Factbook), showing that the number of political parties in each country should not affect why the two have a different proportion of women in their national parliaments as these are not very conservative parties that historically have low levels of female participation.

While Rwanda and Tanzania have similar governmental systems, the format of the two countries' gender quota systems differs. However, the gender quota systems are similar enough where they should not be the cause behind the difference in proportion. In Rwanda, the constitution guarantees 24 seats out of 80 for women in the National Assembly as well as 30 percent of seats in the Senate. There are party sanctions if there is non-compliance with these quotas. In Tanzania, the constitution guarantees between 20 and 30 percent of women in the parliament (CIA World Factbook). Even though there are slight differences in these quotas, the two are roughly the same, hovering at about 30 percent women required for the national legislatures as a whole. Both countries exceed their quotas, with Tanzania at 36 percent women and Rwanda with 45 seats out of 80 in the National Assembly and 38.5 percent of the seats in the Senate filled by women (Women in Parliaments). With similar gender quota levels in place, the differences in the quota systems themselves should not be a factor as to why the proportion of women in the governments differs.

The two countries also have a similar economic makeup. Although Tanzania has a GDP of 64.71 billion dollars and Rwanda has a much smaller overall GDP at 13.86 billion dollars, Tanzania has a GDP per capita of \$1,500 and Rwanda's is at \$1,400 (CIA World Factbook).

Since the two have a similar GDP per capita, the average economic livelihood of an individual in each country is roughly the same. In addition, 90 percent of Rwanda's workforce does agricultural work, and 80 percent does in Tanzania. The rest of each country's GDP is made up of industrial and service work, with Tanzania relying more on services than Rwanda. The amount of poverty is similar as well, with 44.4 percent of Rwanda's population below the poverty line and 36 of Tanzania's (CIA World Factbook). What this ultimately means is that the economic livelihood of women in each country is similar. In Rwanda, the genocide created a population that had a larger proportion of women. This proportion still exists, and some have called women the "economic backbone" (Desai, 2010) of the country despite having negative stereotypes toward them. These stereotypes exist in Tanzania as well, with society believing women need to mainly care for the children. Yet women make up 80 percent of the labor force in rural areas and make 60 percent of Tanzania's food production (Gender, 2012). In both countries, women face stereotypes yet they constitute a large part of the working sector. Since the level of employment and the stereotypes against women having certain jobs are roughly the same, it should be equally likely that women become members of the National Parliament in each country.

As Rwanda and Tanzania hold many similarities, the difference in female representation proves puzzling. Specifically, women have been able to break past the barrier of reserved seats in Rwanda, whereas in Tanzania, the number of women in the legislature is closer to the set proportion in the constitution. In Rwanda, "of the 24 women who held the reserved quota seats from 2003 to 2008, only a small number ran for those seats again. Some choose not to continue in politics. Most chose to run on political party ballots in the 2008 election, competing with the men – and many were successful, which is what catapulted the percentage of women to 56

[percent]” (Friedman, 2008). Women began to run for open seats to prove that they could win them. However this same pattern has not occurred in Tanzania, where the members of parliament, or MPs, rarely run for open seats. This pattern was seen from 1985 to 2000, where “95 percent of the female MPs entered the legislature via the special seats arrangement” (Meena, 2003). In addition to women mostly winning solely the reserved seats, Tanzania initially had difficulty filling the reserved seats. When the quota was put in place in Tanzania, it did not immediately reach its 30 percent target (Meena). Women in Rwanda have been able to move beyond where their quota was set, whereas women in Tanzania have not.

While Rwanda and Tanzania’s gender proportions may not have been specifically compared before, there has been research done that would suggest a reason behind the difference in the two countries’ proportions. Other scholars including Elizabeth Powley would argue that Rwanda has a higher proportion of female representation due to its recent genocide. During the genocide, more men were killed than women, creating a population with a higher proportion of women than men (Desai). Some would argue that the proportion of women in legislature simply shifted because more women were needed to fill the roles as there were fewer men available to do so. They would say Tanzania did not receive this shock to its system, and thus it did not undergo this change. Powley states that women became more empowered after the Rwandan genocide as they “immediately assumed roles as heads of household, community leaders and financial providers” (Powley, 2012). However if women filled government roles due to the genocide, the substantial increase in female representation in Rwanda would have occurred right after the genocide ended in 1994. Instead, “over the next nine years, the number of women holding political office steadily increased to 25.7 percent just before the 2003 elections” (Hogg, 2012). Before the genocide, women never held more than 18 percent of seats in parliament

(Powley). The rise from 18 to 25.7 percent over a course of nine years does not mark an instant increase in representation that could be attributed to the genocide. Rather, women gained representation over time. The genocide did change the proportion of females in the country to males, but the increase in representation was not due to a change in social norms stemming from that change in proportion. Women did not have to go into governmental roles because the proportions in society changed. There was not a backlash saying women should lead as men caused the country's conflict. Other scholars may argue that the genocide is what accounts for Rwanda's high proportion, however this argument does not hold up. Instead, other reasons as to why this difference exists must be tested.

As Rwanda and Tanzania are similar in every way apart from their type of electoral system, this is a key factor as to why women have been more likely to run for open seats and win them in Rwanda. In her article "The Impact of Electoral Reform on Women's Representation," Pippa Norris explores whether a country's type of electoral system has an effect on the proportion of women in its national legislature. Norris specifically examines whether the Netherlands changing from a PR system to introducing a few SMDP districts will decrease their proportion (Norris, 2006).

Norris comes to find that on average more women are elected in a party list PR system, especially when the country has a large district magnitude, than in a majoritarian electoral system using a SMDP system. While Norris found this correlation, the type of electoral system is not a necessary or sufficient condition for a high or low proportion of women in legislature, as there are other factors that can affect the proportion. Norris proposes that if the Netherlands introduces some single-member districts into their electoral system, the proportion of women in its national legislature will likely decrease (Norris). As Rwanda allocates their national

legislature's open seats using a PR electoral system and Tanzania does so using an SMDP system, Norris' theory shows that this is a key reason as to why the two countries have such a marked difference in female representation.

Norris puts forth compelling empirical evidence to justify her argument. With data taken from 175 nations in 2005, Norris found women's representation by type of electoral system. The data shows that women are nearly twice as likely to be elected to legislature under a PR system at 19.6 percent as under an SMDP system at 10.5 percent. Additionally, combined or mixed systems had an average of 13.6 percent (Norris). With such a significant difference in the proportion of women in PR than in SMDP systems, Norris argues that the type of electoral system does have an effect on the proportion of women in legislature. Norris then uses this evidence to say that if the Netherlands moves away from a PR system, which has the highest percentage of women in legislature, that their proportion will likely drop. Norris does not simply present empirical evidence to support her argument; she goes on to give three potential reasons to explain why women benefit from a PR electoral system. The first is due to vote-maximizing strategies. In a PR system, each party presents a list of candidates to the public for each multimember district. Since they want to maximize their appeal, parties aim to include all major social cleavages in their list of candidates, including women. This effect is not seen in SMDP systems, where only one candidate is elected per district (Clark, Golder, and Golder). With only one candidate, diversity in representation becomes less important at the district level and women are more often excluded. Another reason Norris lists is that it is more difficult for women to be elected in an SMDP system since they go up against incumbents, which are regularly males, more often. In SMDP systems 70 percent of incumbents return on average, whereas only 66 percent return in PR systems (Norris). Lastly it is more difficult for positive action strategies like

quotas to be implemented in SMDP systems than in PR systems since it is difficult to decide what districts have to follow the quota instead of simply applying it to larger multimember districts. All three of these explanations could potentially be factors as to why more women are elected in PR systems, and may be at play in regards to Rwanda and Tanzania.

Norris' theory does not apply to the reserved seats each country sets aside for women. In Tanzania, "the reserved seats for women are allocated in direct proportion to the number of seats a political party wins in the parliamentary elections" (Meena). The political parties themselves fill the seats, with each party receiving the same proportion of reserved seats as their proportion of national votes. This means that the reserved seats themselves are not elected using an SMDP manner. However even though this is not the case, the low proportion of women elected to Tanzania's open legislative seats can still be examined using Norris' theory. Similarly, even though Rwanda's reserved seats are not allocated using a traditional PR system, as the 24 reserved seats in the Chamber of Deputies are elected by women from each province (Tanzania), their open seats are. As Tanzania uses an SMDP system for its open seats and Rwanda uses a PR system, Norris' theory says that this would create less female representation in Tanzania and more in Rwanda. Although Norris specifically applied her argument to the Netherlands, it is still applicable when comparing any SMDP system with a PR system. Norris argues that the electoral systems would have an effect on any country's proportion of women in national legislature, including Rwanda and Tanzania. The difference in electoral systems between the two countries is a key factor as to why women are more successful in obtaining open seats in Rwanda than they are in Tanzania.

Norris lists three potential causes as to why women are elected more easily to legislature under a PR electoral system. Data from Rwanda and Tanzania can be compared to see if Norris'

causal mechanisms are different in each country, showing that they contribute to why the electoral systems create this difference in representation. If a difference exists, this may be a factor as to why a PR system makes it easier for women to run for office in Rwanda. The first reason Norris lists is vote-maximizing strategies. She says under PR systems, parties are more likely to include women in their list of candidates to appeal to the female voters in a plurality district. If vote-maximizing strategies are a contributing factor to the difference in female representation, parties would include women on their lists for the open seats in Rwanda to appeal to the public. In the 2008 elections, Rwanda “became the first country in the world where women outnumber men in parliament” (Siuberski, 2012). Along with the 24 reserved seats, women won 20 out of the 53 seats attributed in direct elections. As for political parties, President Paul Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) secured a majority in the elections, winning 36 out of the 53 open seats (Political Handbook). By going through the list of current members of parliament (Rwanda), I found that 13 of the representatives from the RPF are women. This means that the RPF clearly put forth female candidates on their party list to appeal to women, which constitute 55 percent of the registered voters in Rwanda (Siuberski). Interestingly, three of the seven members of parliament from the Social Democratic Party (PSD) are women, as well as two of the four from the Liberal Party (PL) (Rwanda). The smaller parties have a greater proportion of women in their members of parliament. This means that they put more women on their party lists likely in an attempt to appeal to this large sector of the population and gain more seats. As each party in Rwanda’s parliament has female representatives in their open seats, each party included women on their list as a vote-maximizing strategy, which was especially used by smaller parties. This effect can only be seen in a PR electoral system.

This same effect cannot be potentially seen in Tanzania. Using an SMDP system, only one candidate is elected per district for the open seats in the legislature. One candidate cannot possibly reflect every voter's diverse background, and thus specific groups such as women are not especially considered when electing one candidate for a district. This may be a factor as to why in Tanzania there has been little progress in female representation apart from the special seats assigned for them. The reserved seats have actually had a reverse effect as they "have taken the pressure off of political parties to nominate women to stand in constituency seats" (Meena). Rather than including women in their races, political parties have felt less need to run women for open seats in Tanzania. The SMDP system does not encourage them to nominate women for open seats, unlike what has been seen under Rwanda's PR system.

The second factor that Norris lists as contributing to making SMDP systems have less female representation is that they have higher rates of incumbency. This makes it harder for women who are running for office to be elected, as they run against males who have already been in office. If this is a contributing factor making Tanzania's rate of representation lower than Rwanda's, incumbency rates would be higher in Tanzania than they are in Rwanda. There are a few signs that this may be the case, however because neither country has reported their rates of incumbency, it is difficult to tell. Incumbents do have a monetary advantage in Tanzania, as "the election law provides for parliamentarians completing a term to receive 40 million TZS (\$27,000) as a 'gratuity,' which incumbents can use in reelection campaigns" (2010 Human Rights Report: Tanzania). Government funding may make it slightly easier for incumbents to be reelected in Tanzania than in Rwanda, making it harder for new female candidates to run for office. Additionally, by going through Tanzania's parliament from 2005 to 2010 (Parliament of Tanzania) and finding the names that overlapped with the current parliament, I calculated that

141 out of 239 of the current members of parliament are incumbents, or roughly 56 percent. This is not a true rate of incumbency as it does not account for previous members of parliament who chose not to run for office in the next term, but it does show that a majority of Tanzania's current legislature are incumbents. The previous list of parliament members in Rwanda from 2003 to 2008 could not be found, so this number could not be calculated for Rwanda. Both the increased funding and the majority of parliament members being incumbents show that incumbency rates may be a factor at work making Tanzania's proportion of women in office lower than Rwanda's, however it is difficult to tell definitively whether it is or not.

Lastly, the third reason Norris lists for SMDP systems having less women in office is that it is more difficult for positive action strategies like quota systems to be implemented in an SMDP system. Instead of being able to make sure that each party list has the quota's proportion of women, it becomes more difficult to decide what districts will have to follow the quota or how the quota will be divided. If this was a contributing factor in this case, the SMDP system itself in Tanzania would hinder its ability to implement a quota system. However, this is not the case. Tanzania meets its quota by having reserved seats which are then filled by the political parties in proportion to the national votes they receive (Meena). Since Tanzania does not implement the reserved seats through an SMDP system, the electoral system itself is not hindering the implementation of the quota. This factor cannot account for the difference in representation between the two countries.

While each of Norris' causal mechanisms may not be at play, the theory applies well to the cases as a whole. Parties have definitely included women on their lists in Rwanda, showing that having a PR electoral system has increased the number of women who have won open seats. In Tanzania, this same effect from vote-maximizing strategies cannot be seen. Additionally,

higher incumbency rates in Tanzania may be at play. Norris says that having a PR electoral system increases female representation, and Rwanda's PR electoral system has likely done just that. However, one inherent weakness in studying this question is that it is difficult to evaluate a culture and its attitudes toward women. While societies may tout themselves as progressive, seeing women as equally fit to be in office, individuals may keep their true beliefs hidden. It is fully possible that there is preference falsification, where individuals do not express their views publicly (Clark, Golder, and Golder), in Tanzania on the topic of female representation.

Individuals may believe that women are less capable of being in office, but since it is not popular to have this belief, they keep it hidden. Such a belief would still affect their voting patterns.

However, because these views are not expressed, it is hard to say whether or not they exist.

While electoral systems likely have an effect on whether women run for open seats in Tanzania and Rwanda, it is difficult to tell whether larger societal views may be at play.

Norris' theory presents a compelling reason as to why there is a difference in female representation in Rwanda and Tanzania. However, it is possible that this is not the only factor at work causing this difference, and other options should be explored as well. Within Norris' theory itself, there are other potential factors that could have influenced her results at large. Norris admits that it is hard to attribute the percentage of women in government "per se" (Norris) to electoral reform. Norris lists several other potential reasons, including "type of colonial heritage, political culture, party system, or the level of democratic development of the countries that chose this type of electoral system" (Norris). She presents no evidence that any of these factors do not have a greater effect on the proportion of women in government than electoral systems, meaning they could be lurking variables that influence Norris' results. For example if a country's political culture is focused on women's issues, they may be more likely to elect women to office. In

regards to the case Norris examines, the Netherlands, its history of having a high proportion of female representatives may have made the expectation that women can lead an institutionalized aspect of the country's culture. While Norris says moving away from a PR system would decrease the Netherlands' female representation, it is difficult to say whether changing electoral systems would truly have this effect as a high level of female representation may already be ingrained in the country. Similarly, it is difficult to tell whether the type of electoral system is the only factor at work causing a difference in Rwanda and Tanzania's proportions.

One additional difference that may be encouraging women to run for open seats in Rwanda is having a more accepting political culture than Tanzania. The Rwandan Constitution itself "enshrines a commitment to gender equality" (Powley). The constitution says that it is "committed to ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between men and women without prejudice to the principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development" (Rwanda Constitutions and Fundamental Laws). The writing is meant to encourage equality within society, potentially contributing to making the political culture more accepting of women. Another factor that may make Rwanda more open to female leadership is that they have women's councils on a local level. These are grassroots structures that are elected at the cell level by women only that look at local women's issues, putting on skill training and raising awareness on women's rights (Powley). These structures show Rwandan communities that females are able to lead, and may cause women to be seen as more capable of political leadership on the national level as well.

In Tanzania, this same political culture is not present. Many female members of parliament make an effort to fit in with the male legislatures. Many of them "considered themselves to be 'national' MPs, and not just MPs for women" (Meena) despite being elected to

fill reserved seats meant exclusively for women. In essence, they do not see themselves as required to address women's issues, but rather want to be treated just like any other member of parliament. In addition, when the speaker of the house made a sexist joke "no female MP dared to protest" (Meena) the comment, showing that Tanzania's political culture is less accepting of women. It expects them to make a conscious effort to fit in with the male standards and not set themselves apart as female leaders.

It is entirely possible that this difference in political culture between the two countries arose because of the difference in representation that they have. Rwanda may have a more accepting political culture due to a history of having more women in government, thus making it more politically acceptable for women to be there. Having a PR electoral system could have caused more women to be elected, making a more accepting political culture. The difference in how women in parliament are viewed in each country could stem from their electoral systems.

There is much evidence supporting that electoral systems have caused a difference in representation in the two countries. With all of the other similarities the two countries hold, it is meaningful that parties have included women in their lists in Rwanda's PR electoral system while women have won few open seats in Tanzania's SMDP system. Political culture may also be a factor causing this difference in proportion, but the difference in political culture could have arisen due to the electoral systems. The difficulty in being able to give a definitive answer to this puzzle lies in the difficulty to tell if there are differences in how each society views women being in office. While there is much evidence that shows electoral systems have a hand in causing this difference in representation, the bigger picture may include other factors that contribute to a society's mindset, causing women to think they should not run or causing men to think women are less capable of running for office in Tanzania than in Rwanda. It is important to continue to

study this question and examine cultural differences that hold women back from being equal members of society. At this moment, what can be said with a good amount of certainty is that electoral systems have had an effect on Rwanda and Tanzania's proportion of women in government. If the world would like to increase its representation of women, it should learn from these cases and consider the effect of electoral systems. If countries want to keep their current SMDP electoral systems, they may need to consider other strategies if they would like to see their representation of women increase in the long run.

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